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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
20 September 1966

State Department review
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HIGHLIGHTS

There are indications that political maneuvering to curb the influence of the military establishment in the constitution drafting process is underway among the delegates of the constituent assembly.

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

US Marine battles with Communist troops in northernmost Quang Tri Province are reported (Paras. 1-2). US soldiers participating in Operation THAYER in the coastal flatlands of Binh Dinh Province wiped out a 15-man enemy force (Para. 3). Two new search-and-destroy operations--HUNTSVILLE and KAMUELA--began on 20 September north of Saigon in Binh Duong Province (Paras. 4-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

There are indications that political maneuvering with a southern orientation is underway among constituent assembly delegates, the intention being to curb the influence of the military establishment in the constitution drafting process (Paras. 1-2). The US Embassy has identified a southern regional movement which was very successful in sponsoring candidates in the recent election (Para. 3). It is not yet clear if there is any connection between the current maneuvering and this regional association, but southern political influence in general has been increasing this year (Para. 4). According to the press, the two French businessmen recently arrested for financing antigovernment political activities were released on 20 September (Para. 5).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:

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The current high level of fighter activity over North Vietnam is reported (Paras. 3-5).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

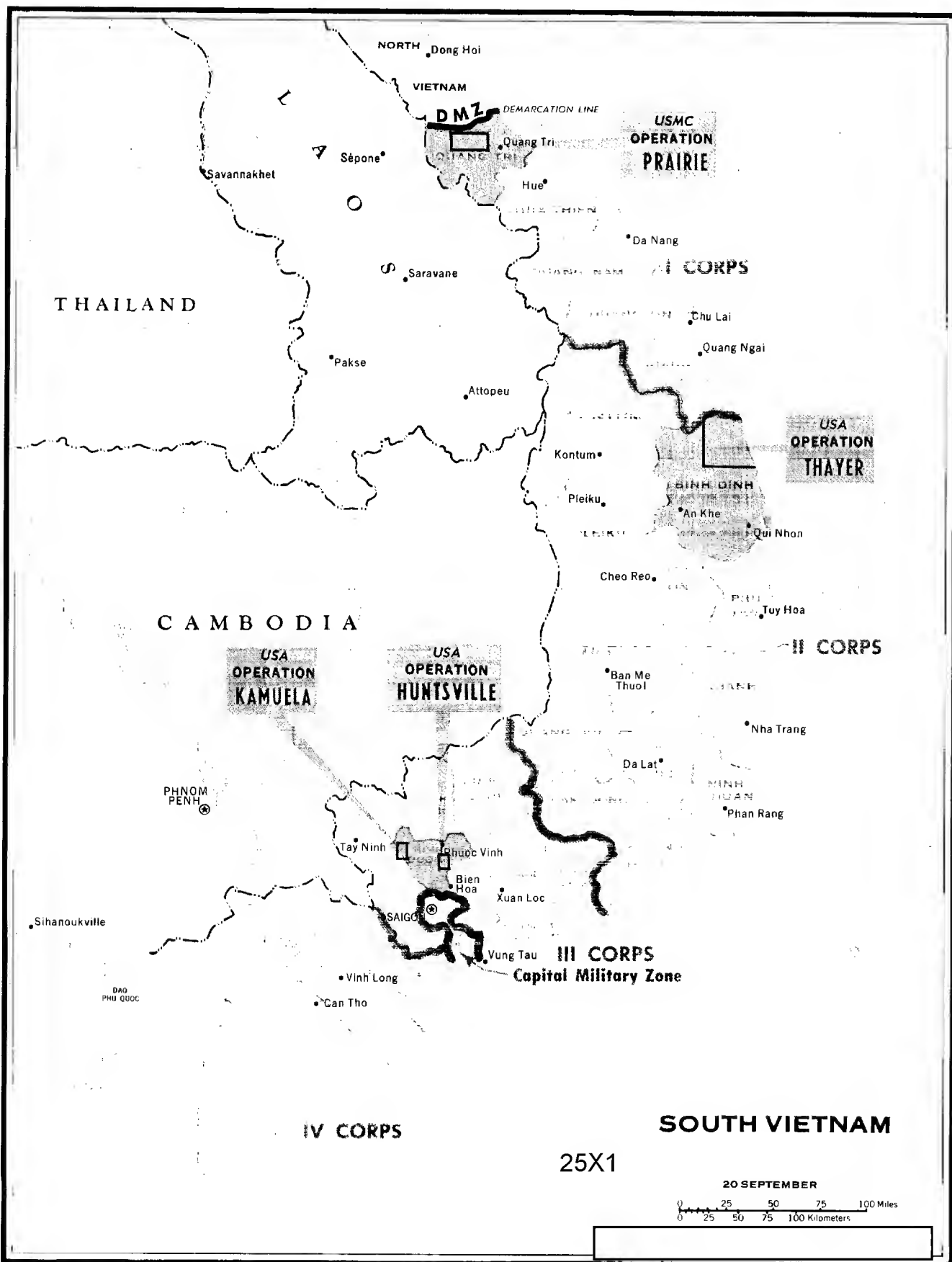
V. Communist Political Developments: An analysis of the status and reporting of the AFP correspondent in Hanoi is offered (Paras. 1-4).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Sihanouk told the press today that border negotiations with the Viet Cong have broken down because of unspecified complications (Para. 1).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US Marines participating in Operation PRAIRIE in northernmost Quang Tri Province, called in artillery and air strikes during a ten-hour battle with a company-size Communist force on 19 September. Following the engagement, Marines counted 53 bodies which were left behind by the retreating enemy. Five Americans were killed and 15 wounded during this encounter.

2. In another clash on the 19th US Marine patrols participating in the same operation experienced heavy fire from Communist forces dug into fortified bunkers in the tree lines along the hills near the southern border of the Demilitarized Zone. A total of five marines were killed and nine wounded with ten enemy soldiers reported killed.

3. Also on 19 September, elements of the US 1st Cavalry Division participating in Operation THAYER in the coastal flatlands of Binh Dinh Province engaged a Communist force estimated to comprise 15 to 20 men of the mixed North Vietnamese - Viet Cong 610th "Yellow Star" Division. The US forces captured a communications center, including telephones, wire, and other communications equipment, and killed 15 of the enemy. One American was killed and another wounded in this encounter.

4. Operation HUNTSVILLE, a joint US - South Vietnamese search-and-destroy operation, began on 20 September in an area of Binh Duong Province about 27 miles north of Saigon. This operation is being conducted by two battalions of the US 1st Infantry Division and elements of the South Vietnamese 48th Army Regiment in an area where three Viet Cong battalions--with a strength of 750 men--are reported to be active.

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5. Operation KAMUELA, a search-and-destroy operation conducted by one battalion of the US 25th Infantry Division, also began on 20 September in an area about 37 miles northwest of Saigon. Three Viet Cong battalions with a strength of 1,400 men are reported to be in the area.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. There are indications that political maneuvering to curb the influence of the military establishment in the constitution drafting process is under way among delegates of the constituent assembly.

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3. The US Embassy has noted that a southern regional group known as the "Movement for the Renaissance of the South" was strikingly successful in sponsoring candidates during the recent election. Of seven candidates or lists it endorsed, six won seats in the assembly. The movement, organized by Youth Minister Vo Long Trieu, a southern Catholic, reportedly enjoyed the patronage of IV Corps commander Quang. The delegates sponsored by the movement could become the nucleus of a southern bloc in the assembly, but its strength and cohesion cannot yet be judged.

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In general, southern yearnings for a greater political voice have changed somewhat the complexion of the government this year, with the number of southern ministers increasing during the cabinet reshuffles in both February and June.

Two French Businessmen Released

5. According to press reports, Philippe Grandjean and Abel Goxe were released on 20 September by the government after having been arrested two weeks ago on suspicion of financing antigovernment groups. No charges were filed against the two French businessmen.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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More MIG Engagements

3. The current high level of fighter activity over North Vietnam resumed on 20 September after a one day lull. In two encounters north and northwest of Hanoi seven US strike aircraft engaged a total of seven MIG-17s with cannon fire but no damage was inflicted by either side.

4. In the first incident, four F-105s were searching for SAM sites about 60 miles northwest of

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Hanoi when they detected a flight of three DRV fighters. In the four-minute air battle that followed, considerable gunfire was exchanged, but no hits were observed on the MIGs, and the F-105s returned to base without damage. Twelve minutes later, another flight of three F-105s was attacked by four MIG-17s after completing a strike on the Lang Luong Highway bridge 45 miles north of Hanoi. The US planes returned the fire of the DRV fighters without result and departed the area unscathed.

5. During the past five days US aircraft have had nine encounters with NVN interceptors; six of these encounters have involved exchange of cannon or missile fire. Only one plane has been lost to either side, but the number and aggressiveness of enemy fighters over North Vietnam indicate that another period of intense action on the part of the DRV air force is under way.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnam is displaying increasing pique at the reporting of Jean Raffaelli, the AFP correspondent in Hanoi. On 19 September Hanoi radio denounced a news dispatch filed by Raffaelli three days earlier which claimed that Chinese Communist and Albanian diplomats in Hanoi had boycotted a reception celebrating the arrival of new rail equipment from the USSR and Eastern European countries. Raffaelli's account of the alleged event was described by Hanoi radio as "groundless and ill intentioned."

2. Hanoi's displeasure over Raffaelli's reporting has been evident for some months. In June, a North Vietnam daily characterized him as "sold to the imperialists" and he was given a verbal warning by the North Vietnamese Government for an article he had written reporting rumors of a Hanoi interest in negotiations.

3. Raffaelli's reports have covered a wide range of topics and have varied markedly in accuracy. He

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Sihanouk told the press today that Cambodian border negotiations with the Viet Cong broke down last weekend as a result of certain unspecified "complications," according to sketchy press reports from Phnom Penh. Sihanouk indicated, however, that a "simple and shorter" agreement between himself and Liberation Front chairman Nguyen Huu Tho was still a possibility.

2. Although Sihanouk had stated earlier this month that a border agreement with the Viet Cong would be signed before the end of the year, the month-old negotiations have been plagued by a score of procedural and substantive problems. Behind these are Sihanouk's fear of the possible consequences of concluding such an agreement, and his desire to extract as much as possible in the way of "guarantees" and border concessions to make the risk worthwhile.

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